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SUBJECT: EUR A/S FRIED'S SEPTEMBER 1 MEETINGS WITH SENIOR MFA AND PRESIDENCY OFFICIALS ON IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH EUROPE

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Karl Hofmann, Reasons 1.4 B and D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On September 1, EUR A/S Daniel Fried met separately with French MFA Political Director Stanislas de Laboulaye, A/S-equivalent Director for Strategic Affairs Philippe Carre, and Presidential Diplomatic Advisor Maurice Gourdault-Montagne. They discussed Iran, NATO, the EU, Russia, Ukraine and the Balkans. (Middle East issues and Turkey/EU reported septel.) Fried said that the purpose of his visit was to examine ways to improve the efficiency of the French-U.S. relationship, already much improved since the President's and the Secretary's efforts last February. The U.S.-French relationship, he said, should be measured in terms of what it can accomplish, especially beyond Europe. On NATO-EU, Fried's French interlocutors agreed on early and informal consultations in order to identify the most appropriate institution for action, a step that would help to mitigate institutional infighting. Laboulaye and Carre looked forward to upcoming meetings in New York to discuss such issues as the role of Iran, Islam, counterterrorism and NATO-EU relations. Carre cautioned that the workings of the EU are often not clearly understood in the U.S. and that political symbolism is as important as action for EU institutions. He said that the key to referring Iran to the UNSC lies with Russia and China, a point reiterated by Gourdault-Montagne. Laboulaye said that France has developed a good working relationship with Russia, in which it is possible to discuss difficult subjects at a high level. Gourdault-Montagne stressed the importance of Franco-German engagement with Moscow, and worried about Russian sensitivity to an eventual Ukraine accession to NATO. On Kosovo, Laboulaye said that France will do what it can to help the UN Special Envoy Eide. END SUMMARY.

Iran and the EU-3: Russia and China Hold the Key

¶2. (C) Laboulaye said he delivered an "impassioned speech" to Russian Deputy FM Sergei Kislyak on August 31, urging him to support sending the Iranian nuclear issue to the UN Security Council. Kislyak maintained that it would be impossible to do so at present given the limitations of the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), but Laboulaye said he insisted, saying that it came down to whether Russia "wants the Iranians to build the bomb or not." The NPT, Laboulaye added, has been useful; however, it could take another ten years to amend the NPT to make nonproliferation protections stronger. Laboulaye admitted that while countries have rights under the NPT, they will still need to prove that their programs are strictly for civilian purposes. France therefore is trying to convince the Russians of the importance of this added piece, i.e., placing the burden of proof on the country developing a nuclear program. Laboulaye said that Kislyak fell back on procedural questions, while noting that no one should conclude that the Russians are set against taking action. Laboulaye described the Russian perspective as "the answer is no, now what's the question?" Kislyak will probably go back to Moscow and discuss with Putin, only then can their answer be known, Laboulaye observed.

¶3. (C) Fried said that Iran would only respond to political pressure and that there needs to be political consequences for Iranian actions. He said that U/S Burns was right when he stressed to the EU-3 that there needs to be a "plan B" and added that it is important not to whittle down the EU and U.S. approach in an effort to placate Russia, South Africa and others, only to be left with a UNSC Resolution that carries no real consequences at all. Laboulaye said that China and Russia held the key to success with Iran, a point seconded by Gourdault-Montagne in his later discussion with Fried. Gourdault-Montagne added that President Chirac would soon call President Putin to remind him that we have consensus on the NPT interpretation on the basis of the August 11 BOG resolution, with the entire NAM on board, a consensus that must be cherished and preserved. Chirac would meet his PRC counterpart in New York to make a similar point and press for P-5 unity on Iran. Gourdault-Montagne added that he had recently had good discussions with NSA Hadley on what to do once we get to New York, with GoF thinking leaning towards seeking a UNSC decision, backing the goals of the EU-3's Paris Agreement with Iran. At every point at which

Fried stressed the need for consequences for Iran, Gourdault-Montagne revisited the issue of forging P-5 consensus, noting it would be a "disaster" if we went to New York without it.

U.S., NATO, and Europe

14. (C) A/S Fried briefed the French on U.S. desire to informally share views on U.S.-European relations and related issues of mutual interest. He emphasized to Laboulaye and MFA A/S-equivalent Director for Strategic Affairs Philippe Carre that the U.S. wanted to work with both NATO, the primary instrument of transatlantic security, and the EU. Towards that end, it was important that both sides first agree on objectives, and then sort out institutional arrangements afterwards. Referring back to the strong messages from the President and the Secretary last February, he stressed that the U.S. continued to support a strong Europe as a partner. Fried said he would like to see France accept a NATO lead on issues where NATO is clearly the most appropriate actor (i.e., including security issues broadly defined) and that we would do the same when the EU is the more appropriate agent (as was the case, for example, in supporting democracy in Ukraine). Fried also observed that the U.S. recognizes that the EU is the more appropriate partner in the context of development in the broader Middle East with NATO playing a supporting role. Determining which institution is most relevant, he said, would perhaps best be accomplished through informal consultations.

15. (C) Fried suggested that informal meetings on NATO and the EU could continue in New York. Carre said France had already consulted with the British on how best to work the informal lunch. Fried offered that one potential topic was "engaging Islam." Carre suggested discussion of Darfur (where the EU and NATO were each contributing to a solution), Islam and CT cooperation. Fried noted that the Secretary might also want to discuss the frontiers of freedom (Ukraine, Georgia, etc). However, there should not be a set, formal agenda.

16. (C) Laboulaye opined that NATO was the appropriate institution to turn to when faced with crises, common threats or joint military operations. For strategic questions, he suggested, it would be the EU/U.S. -- perhaps in a more limited and informal format. He cited the "quad" format as a possible format, calling it efficient and effective. He said that other countries could be invited as appropriate (such as the Poles and the Italians), but that the core remained the quad (though he suggested calling it something else, "EU-3 plus U.S."). Inventing new formats for discussion, he suggested, could prove complicated or counterproductive. Fried replied that the U.S. would not reinstitutionalize a "quad" per se, but that the variable geometry of decision-making dictated a need for coordination among the four and additional countries depending on the issue. Carre agreed that political discussions should precede institutional decision, but also took the opportunity to voice concern that many in the U.S. do not understand the EU, how its institutions work, and how they affect decision-making. While they are often perceived as unwieldy, European institutions and procedures themselves constitute an essential element of EU cohesiveness. Political symbolism is important in the EU.

17. (C) Carre said another point to bear in mind is that Europeans do not look at world problems immediately from a security perspective, and hence do not turn instinctively to NATO as the starting point for solutions. He said the U.S. had a tendency to seek military solutions to security problems, which could become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The French understand, however, that NATO is the conduit for the U.S. to discuss challenges with Europe. Fried agreed that there are problems for which NATO is not the answer, but countered that the U.S. needs to be able to discuss strategic issues at NATO even in instances where no action is required. Fried cited past criticisms by some in Europe that the U.S. had not taken NATO seriously as an institution; now that we are showing our renewed commitment, we need French support. When it comes to action, however, he reminded Carre that we want to use both the EU and NATO. Carre agreed, but cautioned that discussions do not always imply action and that there are issues that could not be discussed in the NATO-EU context.

18. (C) Fried apprised Carre, Laboulaye, and Gourdault-Montagne of our thinking for the NATO summits in 2006 and 2008. The 2006 summit, he said, should focus more on capabilities (NRF, funding, ESDP-NATO cooperation), with possible enlargement decisions for 2008. He said we need to see how ESDP and NATO can come together to produce a whole package of options -- without worrying about institutional sensitivities. The idea would be to line up the EU's and NATO's capabilities next to each other to create a sort of sliding scale that would enable seamless transition from one to the other. On NATO enlargement and Georgia and Ukraine, Fried indicated the U.S. did not have a secret plan. We have

told both countries that NATO is performance-based. Carre agreed on the enlargement approach. He said France does not want to risk or generate political fallout in Ukraine by offering membership -- "we told Ukraine to just do it, create reality, and don't ask yes or no questions." He observed that Georgians needed to be handled more delicately as they possess a sense of entitlement. The French have only told them to move forward on their reforms. Carre said that France is keen on NATO transformation discussions, but cautioned against certain assumptions. France, Laboulaye and Carre added, would not be able to accept a de facto common army at the disposition of SHAPE. In response to Laboulaye's concern about EU autonomy, Fried again explained that the U.S. was not seeking an integration of NATO and EU forces.

¶ 9. (C) Carre said the NAC system at NATO was sometimes being circumvented. NAC should be a place where we can make a political compact or validate a decision sheet. He wasn't sure whether the problem is with the NAC, but France feels that too many policy decisions are de facto being taken haphazardly or by technical bodies. In particular, he complained that France was not happy with how the Military Committee (MC) was being increasingly used as a decision body. He pointed to the decisions on expansion of ISAF as one such an example. Political decisions have to be cleared at a high-level and not at the MC, which had become the default for the NAC, Carre charged. NATO structures should not take on a life of their own. Fried responded that the fix is to recognize that the NAC is a proper instrument of political discussion -- and that we need prior consultations.

Fried said the U.S. believes that NAC decisions should have real weight. A NAC decision has to lead to 1) forces that are capable to be brought into action, 2) and to a shortened timeframe between political-strategic decisions and required action.

¶ 10. (C) In parting with Carre, the latter informed Fried that on ISAF issues, Defense Minister Alliot-Marie likely would soon announce that France was prepared to take the lead role in the Kabul region. Discussions on this issue were ongoing with the Turks. On ISAF-OEF links, France believes that it needs more clarity on what the U.S. plans to do with its forces. He also voiced concern that there are discussions at NATO on how to develop anti-insurgency strategies, which could lead to a duplication at ISAF of OEF's mission.

¶ 11. (C) A/S Fried concluded discussions on NATO by reminding Laboulaye and Carre that he would visit Brussels more frequently and talk with counterparts at both NATO and the EU. He also noted that U.S. Ambassador Nuland was working hard to build a NATO-EU strategic partnership and to develop a good working relationship with her French NATO counterpart. Carre reciprocated French support for Amb Nuland and noted that incoming French Ambassador Richard "Ricardo" Duque would prove an equally flexible and agreeable partner. Gourdault-Montagne agreed that the arrival of Duque, who had family ties (through his wife) to the U.S. and a close relationship with Chirac, should lead to better bilateral consultations before decisions were taken.

EU Internal Developments

¶ 12. (C) Laboulaye said that the EU is going through a difficult time, but that it aims to become a global actor and a U.S. partner while maintaining its ability to make decisions autonomously. This last element, he said, guarantees that, from time to time, the U.S. and the EU may not agree (he said that this may arise, though he hopes it does not, when it comes time for China to fully emerge on the global scene). Laboulaye said that he appreciates the new U.S. respect for the EU. He said that, more recently, the EU tried (and was successful) in avoiding what had happened during the first Bush administration in Sweden when the President was forced to listen to 15 EU countries basically repeating the same (and negative) message. Laboulaye said that at times the meeting might have felt "artificial," but that with 25 member states it is a "difficult game to play." Laboulaye observed that, in large part due to the 'no' victory in the French constitutional referendum in May, the EU would have to play that game for some time to come. He said that the EU constitution would have made a common EU foreign policy more achievable by establishing a common diplomatic corps and leadership. He added that the people who voted against the constitution did not do so because of common foreign policy concerns. Momentum, he said, is still towards an integrated foreign policy. He stressed that the U.S. should understand that the EU is in a "building process" and that the U.S. should avoid being perceived as an actor that is trying to pull it apart.

¶ 13. (C) Fried said that U.S. support for any project or institution would not be given based on the theoretical merits of the institution, but on results. He cited U.S.-EU cooperation in pressuring the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon and the EU-3's willingness to undertake difficult

negotiations with Iran as concrete examples that reinforced U.S. respect for those institutions. He said that the U.S. would work with any partner that shows the conviction and strength to achieve results. The U.S., he reiterated, welcomed a Europe that aspires to be a partner and not a counterweight, yet the U.S. will continue to foster bilateral relationships with individual European countries. NATO, however, remained the pivotal transatlantic link.

France - Russia and Ukraine

¶14. (C) Laboulaye said that France and Russia would hold their next regular bilateral meeting on October 11, explaining that these meetings began after former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage organized a meeting to

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discuss terrorism with the Russians three years ago. Since then, Laboulaye stated, the Russians and the French have been regularly holding strategic talks. He noted the talks between the French Foreign and Defense Ministers and their Russian counterparts were at first rigid and formal, but have since become more relaxed and productive. The parties discuss a range of topics from nonproliferation to terrorism, and more recently have added regional issues such as Georgia and Moldova. He said that France had been helped by Putin's willingness to support the talks. Russian FM Sergei Lavrov was difficult at first, he said, given Lavrov's traditional hardline Russian approach to diplomacy, but the French have broken through and have been able to discuss subjects like Ukraine with him candidly.

¶15. (C) Fried noted that it is challenging to work with the Russians. Much of the bureaucracy and leadership is anti-Western. Putin, however, does listen to world leaders, such as Chirac, Schroeder and the President, which, he said, reinforces the necessity of having a consistent message. Fried added that that Putin finds it tactically advantageous when the U.S., Britain, France, and the UK quarrel because it diverts attention away from Russia. He said that Russia is not moving in a consistent direction, but admitted that realpolitik would not work either. Fried noted that the U.S. would work with Russia whenever it could, but was realistic about the challenges. Laboulaye agreed that Russians are difficult to deal with and added that they pretend to be in line with the rest of the world as regards terrorism, but really use their position "to cloak Chechnya." Laboulaye also said the Russians would have to radically alter their working and negotiating style as they prepare to assume the G8 chair next year. He said that Russia's success in leading the G8 is an important goal, and a special concern, given that a number of U.S. congressmen believe Russia should be kicked out of the G8. France is trying to help the Russians to learn how to better negotiate with a collection of like-minded countries. Fried assured Laboulaye that there are no Administration plans to try to remove Russia from the G8.

¶16. (C) Gourdault-Montagne stressed the urgency and importance of Franco-German-led efforts to settle the EU's relations with Moscow, opining that the whole world balance could depend on this. Gourdault-Montagne described Putin as doing what he could to bring Russia to a Western standard, while being surrounded by a crowd seeking to serve itself. The Russian G-8 Presidency would be a key test of Putin's resolve, and we should take the opportunity to achieve something. Gourdault-Montagne added that the GoF would seek to continue with Germany the Franco-German-Russian dialogue launched in 2003, which Angela Merkel wanted to utilize for more direct criticism of Moscow. Gourdault-Montagne noted that these trilateral meetings, despite their anti-Iraq war origins, could play a useful role and were not anti-U.S. in nature. Instead, the meetings were an opportunity for the French and German leadership to speak frankly with Putin, who was listening.

¶17. (C) Gourdault-Montagne noted that Chirac planned to go to the Ukraine and Kazakhstan in October, and that the GoF had developed a good rapport with Yushchenko and could speak openly with him. Gourdault-Montagne warned that the question of Ukrainian accession to NATO remained extremely sensitive for Moscow, and concluded that if there remained one potential cause for war in Europe, it was Ukraine. He added that some in the Russian administration felt we were doing too much in their core zone of interest, and one could wonder whether the Russians might launch a move similar to Prague in 1968, to see what the West would do. Gourdault-Montagne cited the example of Finland as a country which became a prosperous democracy on the USSR's doorstep, but added he was not suggesting that the Ukraine should become Finland. A/S Fried responded that the biggest impediment, in his view, to Ukrainian NATO accession was not Russia, but instead was the lack of national consensus towards NATO in the Ukraine, in contrast to public opinion in Poland and Romania. He dismissed prospects for Russia intervening militarily in the

Ukraine, noting the capacity of the latter's army and cautioned against exaggerating the split between the Eastern and Western Ukraine. Fried summed up that we are not moving "breathlessly" towards NATO accession for Georgia or Ukraine, a point welcomed by Gourdault-Montagne.

Balkans

¶18. (C) Fried explained the U.S. position regarding the Balkans, which includes plans to encourage Bosnia to undertake necessary reforms in advance of the tenth anniversary of the Dayton Accords in November. Fried said that he would like to coordinate with the French if they plan on commemorating the actual signing of the accords, which took place in Paris in December. Laboulaye said that France had great respect for UN Special envoy Kai Eide, who, he said, has been agonizing that the "standards are not up to standard" in Kosovo. Decentralization efforts, Laboulaye said, have been far from adequate. He added that the GoF would help Eide however it could, though it feels that public statements would do little at this point. The question, he said, is how to get Serbs to give up Kosovo without losing face. Gourdault-Montagne agreed on the need for a continued, international approach on the Balkans, and the need to keep all parties involved, especially the Russians. On a separate note, he added that the question of Croatian EU accession had direct implications for French domestic politics, as French public would a hard time accepting tougher conditions for Croatia (i.e. insistence that General Gotovina be delivered to the ICTY in the Hague) than those demanded of Turkey. (Gourdault-Montagne's Turkey/EU comments are reported in more detail septel).

¶19. (U) This message was cleared by EUR A/S Fried.

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